Brian Desch

10-11-11

Personal Narrative

Nicole Egley

Young Adults (Ages 13-17)

O Baseball, Where Art Thou

Finally it was the end of the season. One more inning and the 5:30 weekday practices, 11:00 Saturday practices, and all the benefits we were forced to fake smiles at, will all come to an end. The game I had waited for all season is coming to a close. I‘ve been looking forward to this, not because the end of the season meant playoffs, but because the end of the season meant after-school naps, complete social freedom, and, most importantly, no more competitive baseball for the rest of my life. It’s not necessarily that I hate baseball; I don’t at all. And it’s not that I don’t like the coaches; they were awesome and knew how to teach baseball. It isn’t even that I had to put so much effort into something I pretended to enjoy. It was the fact that…the thing is this season was just so…it just wasn’t enjoyable because…wait, was there anything bad about this season? Was I pretending to enjoy it or was I pretending not to just to cover up my enthusiasm? An entire season spent with my best friends playing a game that I loved. What have I been doing all season?

It was the last inning of the last game of my last season and I haven’t cared until now. I don’t want this season to end, I want to win this game and keep playing. Well, we have to get out of the top half of this inning first. All this was running through my mind while everyone was warming up for the inning. I stood between second base and first base as the inning started. It’s the top of their line-up so there’s less of a chance there going to be late on a pitch so I move toward second a little. The first pitch sails past the batter right over the plate for strike one. This guy seems as intent on winning this game as I had become. The second pitch was a curveball hanging right over the outside corner of the plate. A normal player would have watched it go by for strike two but this guy knew what he was doing. \*Crack\*. A stinger hit a few yards to my left. I take one step, and another, but the balls speed is too fast. I leap for it and just barely get my glove on it. It was enough to halt the ball leaving it inches from my head. I quickly stood up and picked up the ball, wasting no time throwing the ball gently, focusing on accuracy, over to first. Five outs until the end of my baseball career and I’m having trouble keeping my mind on this particular game.

I started to envision all the things I would miss about this team. The people I met this season started running through my mind. I don’t want to think about not practicing with the people I had spent my free time with every day for the last few months. If you have ever played a high school sport with people who you’ve grown close to, you know what I mean when I say I gained sixteen new brothers that spring. Running out onto the diamond every day to practice with the people that loved the game we were playing made me proud to call myself an Upper Merion Viking. Through the dripping sweat and the freezing rain, the beating sun and the dim-lit lights, each day we grew closer and became what a team should be, a family.

I was almost completely disconnected from the game when a loud metal \*clang\* woke me from my deep thought. Luckily, it was just a foul ball. The count was two and one. I wasn’t worried though; our pitcher was named the second best pitcher in the league last week. I realized that the entire crowd was silent; they seem just as nervous as each person on the field. Every parent wants there child to end their season with a bang. I could hear the sound of his metal cleats digging into the dirt as his right foot landed heavily and the ball rocketed towards the catcher. But to me, the ball was going slower than I had ever seen it. That’s when I figured out that the crowd hadn’t gone silent; I had involuntarily blocked out any noises that wouldn’t help me win this game. My senses had been heightened to near superhuman levels. The ball had just nearly reached the catcher’s mitt when a bat was flung faster than I had ever seen. The result was a line drive that nearly took off our pitchers head. A lucky instinctual reaction saved him, and us, from a single.

As I saw the crowd jump up with gaping mouths which I could only assume were yelling in excitement, I started to appreciate the things I had never really noticed until now. The fans, our parents and friends, had never given up on us, even when we lost our first four games. They brought us back to life with their consistent passionate screams and hope. How were we so lucky to have the most antagonistic and questioning parents to reinforce us when we got a terrible call. Seeing a parent get kicked out of a high school baseball game really shows how intense a fan can be even when they aren’t physically involved.

Just as I finished thinking about our loyal fans they jumped from their seats again to signify strike three and the end of the inning. As I waited for my right fielder to run in to second so we could run the rest of the way together, which we had done every inning since the beginning of the season, I started thinking “What if this is the last time we run in together?” Somehow my brain turned that miserable emotion into a deep need to do whatever I could to win this game. I was leaving my heart on this field whether we won or not. Right when we got into the dugout I got ready to bat, I was third up that inning and I needed to clear my mind.

But I couldn’t: this could be my last at bat ever. I knew I was done with baseball after this year no matter what so I could focus on studying. A million things were going through my mind and my thoughts were racing a mile a minute. My only chance was to try to concentrate on one of the multiple things racing through my mind. Then I came up with the idea to use one of my memories to fuel me. But with so much to pick from I couldn’t decide which would be the most inspiring. Then it hit me, not a memory from this particular season, but one with the same people that were on this team, the people I had grown up with.

The summer between my sophomore and junior year of high school, my team and I went to the senior league World Series in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. We were competing for the state championship which would qualify us for the regional tournament. We had beaten every team in succession by large numbers. In fact, the game before the championship was the highest scoring game in this and all qualifying tournaments that led up to this. Anyway, the championship came around and we were the heavy underdogs, we were the visitors facing off against a team that had two of the leading pitchers in the tournament thus far and had the biggest “kid” (if you could call him that) I had ever seen. We ended up losing this game, but our entire journey up to this point was inspirational in itself. We were the underdog in nearly every game and came out on top because we were one team striving for a similar goal.

Without even realizing it, I was walking towards home plate, with two outs and no one on. The game looked like it was over to everyone except me; I saw my teammates packing, the other team packing and I knew they had decided the game was over. I disagreed, as I dug my feet into the soft almost comforting dirt, I felt an intensity in my body ready to be unleashed on that baseball. The pitcher started his wind-up; I clenched my teeth, my jaw tensing. His leg rose in the air, there were only seconds until the ball was within reach. He stomped down on the dirt almost sending an earthquake my way. The ball left his hand but it seemed as though it was being lobbed to me as a free pitch. My bat flew swiftly towards the ball as if there was a powerful magnet attracting the two. I couldn’t see behind me but I knew everyone had stopped everything they were doing and watched as the ball flew between Left Field and Center Field. As I ran not even paying attention to where I was running, I watched the ball as if it would explode into brilliant colors at any second. Finally, it hit its peak and came down faster and faster. \*Clink\*. Off the top of the fence, it was still in the park. The center fielder was there before I hit second but there was no way he his arm was beating my legs. With each stride, I could feel the dirt flick up and hit the back of my helmet. The ball was in the air but I felt faster than the ball. I felt faster than a bullet. But it would be close! I slid head first, scooping up a mouthful of dirt and scratching my face with the glassy sharp rocks.

My hand sat on the base and the play was at an end. The only thing determining whether the game was over or hope remained was the umpires call. I felt blood coming from my chin, I must have scratched it on the dirt. The warm thick liquid dripping from my face summed up the effort I put in to the last inning. My determination had added up to a dirty uniform, a busted chin, a lung full of dust, and a scared shitless mind as I awaited my team’s fate. I turn my head to look at the ump but my hearing was gone again. The ump’s mouth was wide open in an attempt to form the word safe. The crowd went nuts, and so did my team.

For those 2 minutes between my triple and the third out of the inning, I gave my team hope. I gave myself hope. It was closure, I had used my entire season to mess around and pretend I didn’t care. That last inning was the best inning in my baseball career, not because I did so well but because I realized all baseball meant to me. Not only this, but I realized all baseball could have been to me. If I had cared as much as I should have, my entire season could have been as intense and successful as this last inning. I regret not being all I could in baseball, I wish I had cared, and I wish I had tried; it’s something I think about almost every day. I won’t make the same mistake again.